Adobe Acrobat 5.0
Digitally sign PDF documents

Like conventional handwritten signatures, digital signatures uniquely identify a person or entity signing a document. The difference is reviewers can sign an electronic version of your document, instead of a printed one. With Adobe® Acrobat® 5, you can have reviewers digitally sign your PDF documents to approve them. Once you've obtained their digital signatures, you can verify them to make sure that they're authentic, track changes between signings, and more.

1. Choose a signature handler.

In Acrobat, choose Edit > Preferences > General. Select Digital Signatures in the left pane, and choose Acrobat Self-Sign Security as your default signature handler in the right pane.

To prepare your PDF document for digital signatures, you first need to choose a signature handler, which determines the appearance and exact contents of the signatures. Acrobat includes the Acrobat Self-Sign Security signature handler, which is easy to use and offers moderate security. You can also use a compatible signature handler obtained from a third-party vendor.
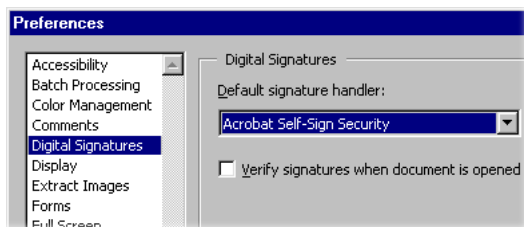
2. Create a user profile.

Choose Tools > Self-Sign Security > Log In, and then click New User Profile. In the Create New User dialog box, enter a name for your profile and a password containing at least six characters. Then save your profile.

A user profile is a password-protected file containing your name, password, and other basic information. It also stores important information used for security purposes.

3. Distribute your PDF document for approval.

Distribute your PDF document to a reviewer by sending it as an e-mail attachment or storing it in a shared network folder. Ask the reviewer to approve your document by choosing Acrobat Self-Sign Security as the signature handler, creating a user profile, and digitally signing your document all using Acrobat.

Tip: To add a new digital signature field and digitally sign a PDF document at the same time, tell the reviewer to select the Digital Signature tool, and drag to draw a field. Enter their password to confirm it, and click Save to save the document with their signature.
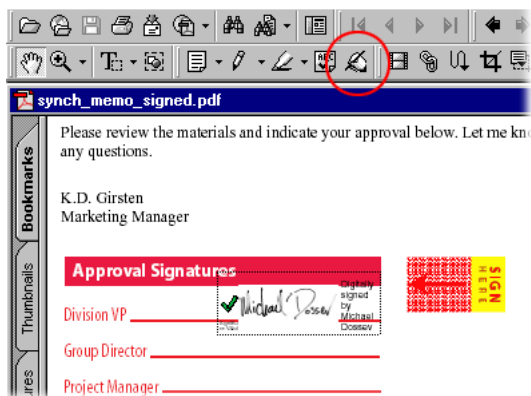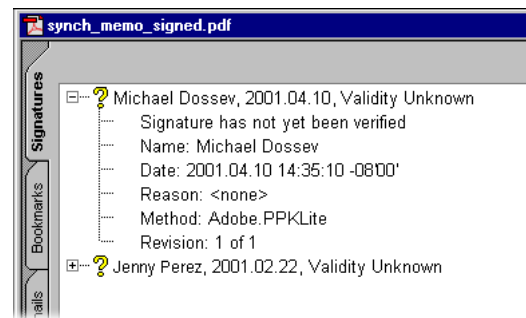

4. Obtain user certificates.

Ask the reviewer to return your document to you along with their user certificate, a separate file exported from Acrobat used for verifying their signature. Then save the certificate to a location on your hard drive. Route the document to additional reviewers as needed.

Tip: To export a user certificate, tell the reviewer to choose Tools > Self-Sign Security > User Settings. Select User Information in the list on the left, and then click Export to File. In the Export Certificate As dialog box, select a file location, and click Save.

5. View information about signatures.

In Acrobat, open the signed PDF document. Choose Window > Signatures to display the Signatures palette. Click the symbol to the left of a signature to expand it.
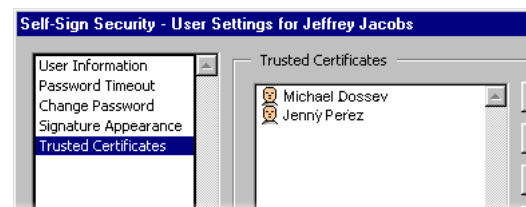
The Signatures palette lists all the signatures in the document with their name, date, and verification status. Icons next to signatures readily indicate their verification status. A question mark icon indicates an unverified signature, while a checkmark icon indicates a verified signature.

6. Build a list of trusted user certificates.

Now that you've obtained the user certificates of your reviewers, you can build a list of trusted certificates. To add a certificate to the list, choose Tools > Self-Sign Security > User Settings. Select Trusted Certificates in the list on the left, and then click Import from File. In the Import Certificate dialog box, select the Acrobat FDF file for the desired certificate, and click Open.

The Verify Identity dialog box displays information about the certificate. Confirm the fingerprint information with the certificate owner, and then click Add to List.

7. Verify signatures.

To verify a signature, select the signature in the Signatures palette, and choose Verify Signature from the Signatures palette menu. To verify all signatures at once, choose Verify All Signatures from the Signatures palette menu.

In addition to using digital signatures to get your documents approved, you can use them to track changes between signings. You can easily retrieve an earlier signed version of a document, as well as compare two signed versions side-by-side in tiled windows and have Acrobat automatically highlight even the most subtle changes for you. For more information about using digital signatures, see the Acrobat 5 online Help.